

“BORDER ROLE” OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT - TO WHICH SIDE DOES THE PENDULUM OF HRM SWING: EMPLOYER OR EMPLOYEES? - THE CASE OF TURKEY

*Halil SAYLI**
*Alparslan Şahin GÖRMÜŞ***

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The interest towards employees has grown recently, in particular, with the studies undertaken by the neoclassical school. The strategic roles played by Human Resources Management (HRM) have earned workers a critical position since the 1990s. During this period, there have been some important changes in the environment in and around enterprises, as well as in the qualifications of employees. The obligation of being successful in an environment with rapid changes and fierce competition has encouraged enterprises to struggle to hire and retain the best employees. This trend has affected the relationships between employees and their organizations, resulting in an increased mutual dependence. HRM has struggled to balance these relationships with its “border role”. This paper attempts to analyze new functions of HRM and, using both quantitative and qualitative data, focuses on the question of where it places itself with respect to its “border role”.

1. INTRODUCTION

High competition, pressure imposed by environmental changes, accelerated trends for change, and new management techniques have caused enterprises to evolve dramatically with respect to their structure as well as cultural and human resources (Garcia, 1997). The spread in the usage of advanced technology which requires hiring highly-skilled employees has led to higher expectations,

* Halil Sayli, PhD, assistant professor, Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences, Ayon Kocatepe University, ANS Kampüsü, Afyonkarahisar, Turkey, phone: + (0) 272 228 12 92, fax: + (0)272 228 11 48, E-mail: sayli@aku.edu.tr

** Alparslan Şahin Görmüş, PhD, assistant professor, Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences, Usak University, Usak, phone: + (0) 505 310 8353, Turkey, E-mail: alparslansahin.gormus@usak.edu.tr

and the importance of these employees has increased (Hopkins, 1995). Another factor changing the employee profile in enterprises is the rapid growth of service and information sectors with an increasing rate of women employees. This change in the employee profile has caused a considerable decrease in unionization. There are other reasons that underlie non-unionization: (i) primary role that HRM has started to play; (ii) increased flexibility in workplaces; (iii) improved importance of high-skilled labour; and (iv) power loss by unionization (Lordoğlu 2000). On the other hand, some studies have found out that there has been a considerable lack of confidence for unions¹. Inadequacy of union leadership (Union of United Metal Employers 1999), and the trust developed between employees and the employer are two main reasons behind this lack of confidence for unions. HRM's contributions to this relationship, stemming from mutual trust between employer and employees, are considerable. HRM, with its new function and applications, has played a major role in the increase of the level of satisfaction and loyalty of employees.

2. NEW FUNCTION OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Fundamental change taking place in the business world encourages traditional relationships in enterprises to change their features completely. This period of human-oriented relationships is considered as a new renaissance (Shrill & Gillian, 1998). During this period, enterprises have put emphasis on behavioral approaches, assigned more importance in human feelings and ideas, and tried to develop relationships on the basis of loyalty, devotion, and trust in order to improve relationships. These developments help bridge the gaps between employees and employers, and develop a dialogue and cooperation culture within organizations. Owing to these developments, "psychological contracts" supported by "reliable promises" have started to replace official contracts (Saylı, 2002). The primary role assigned to "institutional culture" based on "reciprocal cooperation" has increased the importance of direct individual dialogue in labor relations. During this process, when unionized relationships and government intervention are fading away, there are some important responsibilities that HRM should undertake in order to balance relationships between the parties.

Performance pressure stemming from high competition and the need to meet the expectations of a high-skilled labor force are other factors enhancing the importance of human resources management (Beer, 1997). These

¹ Interviews conducted by Union of Unified Metal Employers, Kristal Is Union, Petrol Is Union and DISK (Confederation of Revolutionist Worker Unions) with their members.

developments, which should be included in human resources management, bring about a new and strategic role assigned to HRM. In HRM literature, a change, albeit slow in practice, toward a strategic approach to relationships between employees and employers has been observed, which is beyond what classic functions of personnel management used to indicate. Aforementioned macro- and micro-environmental developments urge human resources management to undertake these new responsibilities. On the other hand, it is argued that human resources management is the "ideological offence of capital" aiming to eliminate labor unions and industrial relations. As mentioned by Ekin and Dereli, the trend in the neo-liberal business management approach towards "non-unionization", "transfer of union functions to human resources management" and "abating collective bargain" should not be ignored (Tinar, 2000). To this end, the neutral and objective application of HRM with the new reality will depend on its content, goal and the approach employed.

A frequent discussion in the literature is that HRM undertakes a strategic role with its new functions. Bundy (1997) lists six human resource functions discussed at a conference with the topic "Rethinking Human Resources Management":

- Efficient management and utilization of employees,
- Increasing employees' abilities so that individual and organizational development can be achieved,
- Rewarding performance and competences,
- Enhancing innovation, creativity and elasticity to improve competitiveness,
- Applying the new approach to redesign job processes, to achieve technological integration, to plan and improve careers and to get mobility within organizations,
- Empowering employees and improving relations with employees.

As seen from the functional classification given above, the new roles HRM undertakes display differences from its former roles. It means that HRM possesses general and strategic responsibilities.

Uyargil and Tüzüner (2003) group Ulrich and Beatty's classification of HRM's new roles under five broad categories: "Coaching, leadership, facilitating, constructiveness, and representing organization's conscience". Randal and Susan (2001) emphasize that HRM's strategic alliance should be related not only to top management but also to branch managers, employees and unions. Silva (1997) argues that "mediating" is the most important function in differentiating new HRM from old HRM and in performing strategic alliance

function. All these findings make one thing clear: a one-way strategy stemming from human resources management's traditional characteristics should be transformed into a two-way and efficient strategy. There are some doubts about the success of HRM's "border role" or "balance responsibility". Today, organizations pay more effort in the training, improvement and direction of employees so as to become successful in a highly-competitive environment, but there are also concerns that this effort aims to exploit the performance of employees. It is obvious that this one-way outcome benefiting the employers rather than the employees undermines the "border role" responsibility of HRM. This fact reveals that human resources management should adopt "real alliance strategies" and balance the benefits and expectations of employers and employees.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND FINDINGS

The pressure from a highly competitive environment urges companies to benefit more from their employees' performance. Unfair distribution of the benefits created by their high performance causes disillusionment in employees. In addition, there are concerns that the tendency of skilled employees to avoid organizational movements and the decrease in union membership create uncertainties in protecting employees' rights. The level of undertaking "border role" responsibility by human resources management in order to fill this gap and create a balance in relations is seen as a question. This study basically aims to provide an answer to this question.

3.1. Research objective

This study analyzes new functions of HRM and focuses on the question of which side of the border the HRM stands while it plays its "border role". In particular, it attempts to answer the following questions:

- Who benefits more from the new developments such as performance pressure of new technology, training and direction, multi-dimensional performance evaluation, constantly pushing mental capacity to its limits and the urge for creativity; employees or employers?
- Can the gap resulting from non-unionization be filled by HRM?
- To which side does the pendulum of HRM swing: employers or employees?

3.2. Research methods

This paper employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. In the context of the qualitative method, human resource managers have been interviewed and asked open-ended questions related to the "border role". In the context of the quantitative method, some data have been collected using a questionnaire in order to evaluate new functions of HRM and to find out whether HRM can perform the "border role" in creating a balance in relations.

The questionnaire consists of three sections: "demographic information", "functional development of HRM" and "new role of HRM". A qualitative tool consists of an interview of four open-ended questions. The questionnaire is prepared based on Altın's study (1997). A pilot study was conducted for the scale and incomprehensible expressions were changed.

3.3. Research content

The research sample consisted of 250 companies, chosen randomly from the top 500 Turkish companies. A total of 102 companies (approximately 41%) responde to the questionnaires. Among them, 12 were disqualified due to errors, which brought the sample to the value of 90 responding companies.

3.4. Research findings

Reliability analyses were conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Simple correlation and regression analyses were applied in order to determine the level and direction of the correlation between variables. Descriptive statistics such as cross-tables and frequency-tables were used.

Table 1. Reliability analysis

Factor Groups	Cronbach's Alpha	Standardized Item Alpha	N
Functional Development	79.08	82.52	18
New Role	71.04	71.85	13
Summed Scale	72.84	76.45	31

Cronbach's Alpha coefficients in Table 1 show that the research scales are highly reliable.

Table 2. General information on the sample

SECTORS	%	EDUCATION	%	GENDER	%	POSITION IN THE COMPANY	%
Textiles	23.3	High School	5.6	Female	18.9	Reporting to the Chairman of Board of Directors	7.8
Services	5.6	Management	30.0	Male	81.1	Reporting to Director General	38.9
Food	18.9	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Science	22.2			Reporting to Deputy Director General	44.4
Machine-Electricity-Electronics	11.1	Engineer	15.6			Reporting to the Coordinator of Administrative Affairs	8.9
Mining	13.3	Graduate Level	8.9				
Metal	11.1	Others	17.8				
Chemistry-Pharmacy	16.7						
TOTAL	100.0	TOTAL	100	TOTAL	100	TOTAL	100

3.5. Functional development of Human Resources Management

There are 18 questions in this section of the questionnaire. The functions are classified into three categories: HRM functions before and after human resource departments are created, and the functions that still need to be implemented.

It has been observed that, especially for the last two decades, human resources management has changed fast and adopted itself to the new conditions and needs; as a result, it has helped organizations follow the requirements of the changing environment. As seen in Table 3, about 27% of the responding managers of human resources think that they perform some functions which existed even before HR departments were created. Most of them (approximately 64%) believe that they perform some functions which are unique to human resource departments. The remaining 9% of managers do not perform some functions they actually should.

Table 3. Human Resource Management functions

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS	BEFORE HRM DEPT. IS CREATED (% of respondents)	AFTER HRM DEPT. IS CREATED (% of respondents)	FUNCTIONS STILL NEEDED (% of respondents)
1. Employee recruitment	73.3	26.7	
2. Determining compensations	72.2	27.8	
3. Occupational health and safety	71.1	28.9	
4. Union relations	50.0	50.0	
5. Determining wage increase rate	44.4	44.4	
6. Orientation	26.7	73.3	
7. Training	10.7	73.3	16
8. Performance evaluation	31.2	67.8	
9. Job evaluation	31.1	68.9	
10. Task analysis	35.6	64.4	
11. Career planning	14.0	65.6	20.4
12. Conflict resolution between employees and employers	12.2	57.8	30.0
13. Regulating relationships between employees and employers	10.0	55.6	34.4
14. Enhancing the quality of life of employees		53.3	22.1
15. Multi-dimensional performance evaluation		52.2	43.3
16. HRM planning	7.8	50.0	20.0
17. Organizational development		48.9	51.1
18. Promoting the economic rights of employees		43.3	26.7
Total	26.8	58.6	14.6

The previous results demonstrate that, after HR departments were established, the functions aiming to enhance employee performance and provide them with self improvement have been on the rise. Recent developments indicate that HR managers are starting to perform their functions in a complete and pro-active manner. This is the reason for which they have gained a more strategic role in companies.

3.6. Analysis of the “border role” of Human Resource Management

In the first section of the paper, the primary functions of human resources management have been explored. In this section, the tendency and goals of

these developing functions will be analyzed. In other words, an answer is sought to the question to what extent human resources management can undertake their "border role" responsibility in practice. In the part of the questionnaire related to this research objective, eight questions were formulated. With these questions, an attempt is made to determine the side of the "border" in which the human resource management is positioned.

Table 4: The results on HRM's "border role"

STATEMENTS	Average	%	S.D.	N
HR department should balance the relationships.	4.622	92.3	0.81527	90
HR department aims to benefit from employee performance using new techniques.	4.333	86.7	0.92786	90
Employees are considered as "strategic" factors in our company.	4.088	79.9	0.96738	90
Our company sees its employees as "partners".	3.755	68.9	1.0338	90
Our company fairly distributes the additional profits generated by performance pressure.	3.855	68.9	0.99437	90
HR department can play trade unions' role in the company.	3.411	54.5	1.2076	90
Employees have increased their bargaining power.	3.122	34.4	0.99242	90

As demonstrated by previous results, organizations are after exploiting the performance of employees by using modern techniques and technologies. However, it is also emphasized that the human resource approach attempts to develop a more employee-oriented policy, which, in 92.3% of analyzed cases, aims toward developing balanced relationships among the management and employees. Employees are seen as a strategic factor in organizations, but it is stated that they lack the necessary power (which is both a contradicting and interesting situation). A total of 38.9% of the respondents stated that unions were losing members; 30 % gave no comment and 31 % defended the contrary position, depending also on the sector to which the company belongs. Although there are serious differences between sectors, it can be said that unions are losing considerable power in some sectors. A total of 54.5% of the respondents believe that human resource departments could undertake the role of trade unions. This result indicates that new opportunities and facilities provided by human resources management, which acts as a trustworthy partner in labour relations, cause a decline in the need for unions.

The majority of the organizations see their employees both as a "strategic factor" and "partners". This finding indicates that HR managers seem to act on behalf of the employees. Another important finding, demonstrated by Table 4 is that employees' power has not increased as fast as the improvement in their relative importance. This finding is obvious when one looks at the second column in Table 4. Namely, 79.9% of the respondents see the employees as a strategic factor, whereas only 34.4% think that "*employees have increased their bargaining power*". The high agreement level (86.7%) with the statement that the "*HR department aims to benefit more from employee performance using new techniques*" deserves more attention. This shows that organizations try to benefit more from their employees. Therefore, although organizations believe that employees are important assets for gaining competitive power in the increasingly competitive market, they tend to believe that employees do not have the power to force the organizations to share the wealth. This implies that "fierce competition" is the driving factor which forces organizations to better meet their employees' expectations and turn the employees into "strategic factors" (Morley, 2004).

Table 5. Level of importance of employees

VARIABLES	R/R ²	P	N
Employees are the strategic factor. <i>They increase the power of employers.</i>	0.316	0.002	0.090

(p < 0.01)

The correlation between the statements "employees are strategic factors" and "employees have increased their bargaining power" is found to be statistically significant (p<0.02; R²=0.316). Companies struggle to retain their employees with a potential to bring about success. This struggle helps non-unionization in companies. The relation between these two variables will be tested using correlation analyses.

Table 6: Factors affecting non-unionization

VARIABLES	R	P	N
The employees are seen as partners <i>Unions are losing power</i>	-0.83	0.001	90
The employees are a strategic factor <i>Unions are losing power</i>	-0.94	0.001	90
The employees are increasing their bargaining power <i>Unions are losing power</i>	-0.60	0.001	90

(p<0.01)

The negative correlation coefficient (-0.83) between the statements "*the employees are seen as partners*" and "*unions are losing power*" is found to be statistically significant. A similar finding holds true for the statements that "*employees are strategic factors*" and "*unions are losing power*": the correlation coefficient of -0.94 is statistically significant. The coefficient for the statements "*employees are increasing bargaining power*" and "*unions are losing power*" is -0.60 and statistically moderately significant. These results imply that increasing importance of employees in the eyes of their employers results in a decline in union membership.

An increase in the ratio of skilled employees to total employees and their disconnection with organizational movements are other important factors that accelerate non-unionization (Saylı, 2002). HRM activities oriented towards employees and the fact that companies are increasingly seeing their employees as "partners" are other important factors that result in the fading interest towards unions.

An important indicator of this change in industrial relations is, without doubt, the search for finding new ways after the unions lose their power. The opening remarks by the Head of the Association of the International Industry Relations at the 10th World Congress in 1995 focused on the need of a renaissance in the research on industrial relations. Its 11th congress (in 1995) dealt with "*Thriving Competition and Social Justice*" and the 12th congress, in 2000, placed the emphasis on "*Global Integration and Futures of Industrial Relations and Human Resources Management*".

All of the foregoing gives an idea on the direction headed by the research on the topic (Tinar)². As discussed by Ekin and Dereli, the tendency in the neo-liberal business management approach to non-unionization and undertaking the functions of unions through human resources management, as well as impairing collective bargaining, cannot be ignored (Tinar)³.

In Turkey, the ratio of employees benefiting from collective bargaining to the total number of paid employees has decreased recently, despite campaigns to increase union membership. In 1990, 19% of the paid employees benefited from collective bargaining. This ratio fell to 8.3% in 2002. The unionization ratio in January 1978, which was 62.85%, increased to 68.69% in January 1999 and fell to 58.71% in January 2006⁴ (Yorgun, 2007). Another example is that

² Publication year is missing.

³ Publication year is missing.

⁴ Detailed data can be obtained from the website of the Ministry of Labor.

Petrol-İş’s (Petroleum Union) attempts for organization in 46 workplaces during the 1999-2003 period yielded results only in 14 workplaces (Petrol-İş, 2004). These examples are indicating that the interest in unions in Turkey has been decreasing constantly.

As presented by Table 7, there are differences among sectors with respect to loss of members and power. A total of 80% of the respondents from service industries think that unions have lost power, while 60% believe that they have lost their members. These ratios are 52.9% and 23.5% in the food industry respectively. However, almost 71% of the respondents in this industry state that they have not made up their minds; which makes a “floating” category the biggest one in this industry compared to others. Unions are relatively powerful in other sectors.

Table 7: Sectoral distribution of loss of member and power in unions

SECTORS	Unions lose members (in %)	Unions lose power (in %)
Services	80.0	60.0
Food	52.9	23.5
Mining	41.7	41.6
Textiles	33.4	38.1
Metal	30.0	30.0
Machinery, electricity & electronics	30.0	10.0
Chemistry & pharmacy	20.0	33.3

3.7. The findings on the new role of Human Resource Management

When choosing the participants for the interviews, several factors, such as ability to communicate and provide useful information were used. The goal of these interviews was to analyze in depth the issues at hand. Four open-ended questions were asked to 30 human resource managers in face-to-face contact. Respondents were asked following questions in order to collect information on new functional tendencies and the “border-role” responsibility of human resources management. Expressions employed by the participants were evaluated in terms of their frequencies.

Table 8: Interview results

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES AND FREQUENCIES
1. In the future, what kind of a change do you expect in HRM's goals?	Strategic partnership (10); Win-win model (4); No change (4); Efficiency-centered management (3); Obtaining work peace (2). Total (21)
2. In the future, what kind of changes do you expect in the functions of HR Department (as a new function)?	Relation Management Unit (8); No change (5); Organization development unit (5); e-HRM (4); Measurement-Evaluation Unit (3). Total (25)
3. When you evaluate the HR Department in general terms, to which side does the pendulum of HRM swing: employee or employer?	Should be the "balancing point" (7); Should serve as a "bridge" (5); Should be right "on the border" (3); Should situate itself in the midway (3); Should be on employer's side (3); In fact; New Labor Act is for employees (3); Should be on employees' side (1); I only wish it was balanced (2). Total (27)
4. What changes do you expect in HR Department's authorities when it undertakes new functions?	Limits of its authority should be reassigned (10); It should operate under top manager's supervision (6); Conflicts of authority should be resolved (4); I expect no change (3). Total (23)

The following has been established:

- The topic HR managers emphasize more is the idea of "*strategic partnership*" (10). It is claimed that, once human resources are seen as strategic partners, they will operate more efficiently. (The answer given to the question "*What do you think strategic partnership means?*" is "*It can be defined as HR manager's involvement in the processes of making strategic decisions*").
- A total of eight out of 25 HR managers think that HR departments will be transformed into relation management units in the future. HR managers emphasize that companies are ill-structured in communicating at all levels and HRM should play an active role to resolve this issue. Another

interesting finding is that four of the HR managers think that e-HRM will be applied in the future and, as a result, HRM will shrink to focus on some more strategic issues. To support this idea, the strategic partnership emphasis is repeated by the respondents.

- The response of one of the HR managers reads as follows: *"Higher expectations toward HRM urge us to re-evaluate even new and improved HRM functions, let alone traditional personnel functions"*.
- The third question captures HR managers' evaluation of the "border role". Responses are classified into some categories, four of which put an emphasis on HRM "border role" and have higher frequencies, when compared with the frequencies of other responses. The responses to the question *"To which side does the pendulum of HRM swing?"* are: on the balancing point (7), bridge (5), right on the border (3), and in the midway (3). Responses received from the questionnaire and the results of the detailed interview are similar. Still, some attention should be paid to response categories like "should be on employer's side" (3) and "new labor act is employee-friendly" (3). One HR manager in a multinational company commented: *"If the boss or corporate policy does not support HRM, its struggle to balance will be undermined and not go beyond a good-wish. In fact, today, this is the case and unfortunately what we are dealing with is not more than a wish."* Another HR manager focuses on the same issue as follows: *"How we deal with HRM is staying on the balancing point. Since I am also a member of the board of directors, I can exercise some power, but I cannot say that other HR managers are as successful as me in this issue."* All of the managers attach considerable importance to HRM's "border role", but state that success is far from the acceptable levels. To summarize, the perception of HRM on this strategic role is satisfactory, but its application is not.
- In this section, the new roles that HR departments should undertake and their authorities were questioned. Ten of the participants argued that *"limits of its authority should be reassigned"*; six asserted that *"it should be operating under a top manager's supervision"* and four stated that *"conflicts of authority should be resolved"*. The majority of respondents to this question (23) agreed that there was a conflict of authority and expected it to become more severe in the future. One of the HR managers put it as follows: *"The workload of HR departments is becoming worse. It is impossible to cope with such a workload with 'line authority'. Naturally, every HR manager should have a seat in the board of directors"*. This

statement is an emphasis on the need for increasing the authority of HR managers. Another comment reads as follows: "HRM is expected to undertake some important responsibilities and to succeed at them at high levels. I doubt that these expectations can be met with 'line authority' only.

5. CONCLUSION

Radical changes witnessed in working life cause managerial, structural and cultural changes in organizations; they are also responsible for the shift in human-oriented philosophy. This shift represents an understanding which is based on "mutual cooperation" in labor relations and which pays attention to direct individual dialogue in relations. This new philosophy brought to the agenda new changes in human resources management applications. This change is especially related to strategic features earned by HRM, which proved to be a factor that makes it easier for HRM to perform its "border role" responsibility. Therefore, it is now a critical expectation that HRM has to undertake and perform the role of balancing mutual expectations of employees and employers.

Today's HR managers have a strong belief in the existence of a strong relation between meeting the expectations of employees and the success of organizations. In this case, one of the most important responsibilities of HRM must be to balance mutual expectations in addition to improving their performance and quality of the working environment.

Therefore, it is necessary to reach a more balanced working life through increasing both the performance of employees and the quality of the working life. Although this is the most important task for HRM, it should also become one of the general tasks for the firm. In this context, our study shows that the following practices by employers towards employees are beneficial in increasing the performance of employees and the quality of the working life for the implementing firms. Such practices include the pressure exerted by new technologies on their performance, enforcing employees to be creative, training and orientation for them, constant efforts to increase their capacity of intelligence, and use of the multi-dimensional performance assessments.

On the other hand, it is obvious that employees have become weaker today in realizing their expectations from employers due to the process of deunionization. It has become a source of concern that some firms exploit this situation for their own favor. Under these circumstances, it is the HRM that should play a more active role to ensure a balance between the two parties in the firms. Our study, both in survey and interview forms, underlines this fact very

clearly. In doing so, HRM can take over the role of unions. However, the study also found out that HRM has yet to perform the "border role" fully in practice. In order to do this, it is necessary to increase the authority of HR managers.

Finally, the study reveals the need to pay effort by HRM to establish a working environment and culture based on mutual trust between employees and employers. This is particularly important for avoiding the violation of the psychological contract in the firm. Meeting and balancing of expectations on a voluntary basis will have a contribution to employee satisfaction, as a result of which the success in working life can be improved.

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**"GRANIČNA ULOGA" UPRAVLJANJA LJUDSKIM POTENCIJALIMA
(ULJP) - NA KOJU SE STRANU OKREĆE NJIHALO ULJP-A: PREMA
POSLODAVCU ILI ZAPOSLENICIMA? - SLUČAJ TURSKE**

Sažetak

Interesu za zaposlenike uvelike su pomogla istraživanja provedena u okviru neoklasične škole. Od 1990-ih radnici i njihova uloga u poduzeću percipiraju se u kritičkom smislu, uslijed strateške uloge koju je zadobilo upravljanje ljudskim potencijalima. Tijekom ovog perioda došlo je do značajnih promjena okruženja, ali i samih poduzeća, kao i kvalifikacija zaposlenika. Potreba za postizanjem uspjeha u promjenjivom okruženju, kojeg karakterizira snažna konkurencija, ohrabrilo je poduzeća da se natječu u zapošljavanju i zadržavanju najboljih zaposlenika. Ovaj je trend utjecao i na odnose između zaposlenika i njihovih organizacija, koji su počeli pokazivati karakteristike povećane međusobne ovisnosti. ULJP pokušava uspostaviti ravnotežu u ovim odnosima zauzimajući „graničnu ulogu“. U ovom se radu pokušavaju analizirati nove funkcije ULJP-a te, koristeći kvantitativne i kvalitativne podatke, odgovoriti na pitanje o ostvarivanju prethodno opisane uloge.

